

The 101 Positive Principles of Discipline

IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN "It's Never OK to Hit a Child." Discipline means to teach and train. Punishment (inflicting pain/purposeful injury) is unnecessary and counter-productive. "Discipline is a slow, bit by bit, time-consuming task of helping children to see the sense in acting a certain way." J. Hymes

The Top Ten Principles

1. **Demonstrate Respect Principle** - Treat the child the same way you treat other important people in your life - the way you want him to treat you - and others. (How would I want her to say that to me?)
2. **Make a Big Deal Principle** - Make a big deal over responsible, considerate, appropriate behavior - with attention (your eyeballs), thanks, praise, thumbs-up, recognition, hugs, special privileges, incentives (NOT food).
3. **Incompatible Alternative Principle** - Give the child something to do that is incompatible with the inappropriate behavior. "Help me pick out 6 oranges" (instead of running around the grocery store). If your husband is annoying you by playing his Gameboy, instead of berating him, simply ask him to help you by drying the dishes.
4. **Choice Principle** - Give the child two choices, both of which are positive and acceptable to you. "Would you rather tiptoe or hop upstairs to bed?" ("You choose or I'll choose.") This can be used with spouses. "The garage needs to be cleaned out. Would you rather do it tonight or Saturday?"
5. **When/Then - Abuse it/Lose it Principle** - "When you have finished your homework, then you may watch TV." (No homework - no TV.)
6. **Connect Before You Correct Principle** - Be sure to "connect" with a child - get to know him and show him that you care about him - before you begin to try to correct his behavior. This works well when relating to parents, too. Share positive thoughts with them about their child before you attack the problems!
7. **Validation Principle** - Acknowledge (validate) his wants and feelings. "I know you feel angry with your teacher and want to stay home from school. I don't blame you. The bus will be here in 45 minutes."
8. **Good Head on Your Shoulders Principle** - Tell your child - frequently - especially as s/he reaches the teen years - "You have a good head on your shoulders. You decide. I trust your judgment." This brings out the best in the child and shows him/her that eventually he will be in charge of his own life and responsible for his/her own decisions.
9. **Belonging and Significance Principle** - Remember that everyone needs to feel that s/he belongs and is significant. Help your child to feel important by giving him important jobs to do and reminding him that if he doesn't do them, they don't get done! Help him/her feel important by being responsible.

10. **Timer Says it's Time Principle** - Set a timer to help children make transitions. "When the timer goes off, you will need to put away your books." "In five minutes, we will need to line up for lunch." It is also a good idea to give the child a chance to choose how long he needs to pull himself together. "It's okay to be upset, how long do you need?" Then allow him to remove himself from the group and set the timer. You may offer the child a choice (and set the timer) when it's necessary for him to do something he doesn't want to do. "Do you want to pick up your toys/let Susan have the wagon/take your bath -in one minute or two?"

The Principles in Alphabetical Order

11. **ABC Principle** - Learn to think in terms of ABC (Antecedent, Behavior and Consequences). What was going on before the behavior occurred and what happened afterwards - as a result of the behavior? Many times you can find patterns in behavior - and alter your behavior or the circumstances that may have led up to the inappropriate behavior. Also, you might need to look at what is gained by the behavior - what the child is getting as a result. A child who is overly tired may throw a temper tantrum. In order to get him to stop, he may be given a toy. (In the future, he may throw a temper tantrum just to get a toy.) By changing the antecedent and/or the consequences, a temper tantrum may be avoided in the future.)

12. **Allow Imperfection Principle** - Don't demand perfection. Remember no one likes the "perfect" child, parent or teacher. With perfection as the goal, we are all losers.

13. **Anticipation Principle** - Think ahead about whether or not the child is capable of handling the situation. If not, don't take him (to expensive restaurants, church, beauty parlor, adult movies).

14. **Apology Principle** - Apologize easily - when you goof, or "lose it." ("I wish I could erase what I just said." "You must have been scared by my reaction." "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." "I was wrong." "I'm sorry.") Apologize for your child ("I'm sorry he knocked you down"), but DON'T make your child apologize. (You might be making him lie OR think that wrong-doings can be rectified with an apology.)

15. **Ask the Child Principle** - Ask the child for input. "Do you think this was a good choice?" "What were you trying to accomplish or tell us with your behavior?" "What do you think could help you in the future to remember to make a better choice?" "How would you like for things to be different?" "How about drawing a picture of how you feel right now." Children have wonderful insight into their own behavior and great suggestions for ways to make things better.

16. **Availability Principle** - Make sure that your child always knows where she can turn for help. If you aren't available, be sure someone is. SET ASIDE 15 MINUTES A DAY to spend together. Let her plan how the time is spent.

17. **Babysitter Principle** - Get one.

18. **Bake a Cake Principle** - When all else fails, bake a cake together (and eat some after it cools). It is a great way to stay connected and build happy memories.

19. **Best Friend Principle** - Elicit help from the child's best friend. Ask the best friend to see if he can encourage the child to "do the right thing."

20. Bite Your Lip, Take Leave and Stay Home Principle - There is no place like home. Children might be picking up on our high level of stress. The best part of wisdom might be to scuttle our plans and go/stay HOME! Sometimes we need to take a reality check on our priorities.
21. Blame it on the Rules Principle – “Our school /family rule is to wash your hands before eating.”
22. Brainstorming Principle - Brainstorm with the child possible solutions to the dilemma, problem or predicament.
23. Bunny Planet Principle - (adapted from Rosemary Wells) - Close your eyes and tell the children that you are going to the bunny planet (or another imaginary place). Ask them to tell you when they are ready for you to come back (when things are quiet and they are ready to make good choices). If you are at home, you might go to the bathroom and wait for behavior to improve. Take your telephone, radio and books. Do not come out until behavior has changed.
24. Change of Environment Principle - If the child’s misbehavior cannot be stopped, move to another room or location. (Go outside.)
25. Chill Out Principle - It’s no big deal! Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill. This, too, will pass.
26. Class/Family Meeting Principle – Class and family meetings give children an opportunity to reflect, listen, empathize, and problem-solve. Focus on two-way communication rather than preaching to children. Listen more than you talk. Parents and children continue to learn from each other.
27. Collect Data Principle - Keep a written record of the frequency of inappropriate behaviors. Record the antecedents as well as the consequences. Look for patterns that may give clues as to possible reasons, situations and/or solutions.
28. Common Sense Principle - Use your common sense. Is this reasonable?
29. Cueing Principle - Give the child a cue such as a hand gesture to remind him - ahead of time - of the behavior you want him to exhibit. For example, teach the child that instead of interrupting when you are talking with somebody else, he is to squeeze your hand. This will let you know that he wants to talk to you (as you return the squeeze) and as soon as you can, you will stop the conversation and find out what he wants.
30. Divide and Conquer Principle - Separate children who are reinforcing each other’s misbehavior. Put adult between two children in a restaurant.
31. Don’t Put the Cat with the Pigeons Principle - Don’t place temptation in front of the child. (Don’t leave the candy dish on the table if you don’t want the child to have any candy.)
32. Do the Unexpected Principle - React in a surprising way. Start doing jumping jacks! Clap a familiar rhythm (“Jingle Bells”) - to relieve the tension and get some perspective. It is amazing

how, when your head is cleared, you can think better and decide on a more rational way to handle this situation.

33. Empowerment Principle - Develop child's competency, skills, mastery, independence. Encourage him to solve his own problems. Let him know that his choices will determine his future.

34. Encouragement Principle – Give encouragement as often as possible. Help the child see the progress he has made. (“You got three spelling words correct. That is better than last week!” “Doesn't it feel good to be able to zip your own zipper, make your own bed, clean up your own spills?”)

35. Establish Routines and Traditions Principle - Children behave better when they know what they can count on. Establish traditions which they can anticipate and which provide them with fond memories and feelings of belonging and security.

36. Extinction Principle - Ignore minor misbehavior that is not dangerous, destructive, embarrassing or an impediment to learning. (Look the other way. Play deaf.)

37. Follow Through/Consistency Principle - Don't let the child manipulate you out of using your better judgment. Be firm (but kind)!

38. Frog Suit Principle - Teach the child to “put his/her frog suit on.” A frog suit protects the child from being hurt by other children's careless or cruel comments.

39. Get on the Child's Eye Level Principle – When talking with the child, get down on his/her eye level and look him in the eye while talking softly to him/her.

40. Get Support of Another Person Principle - Ask someone else to help you reinforce the positive behavior.

41. Give Life to an Inanimate Object Principle - Tell the child that “the toothbrush is calling,” or “the trash is calling that it wants to be taken out to the curb.” Give your voice a believable “squeaky” tone to make it more dramatic (and fun).

42. The Golden Rule Principle – Do unto your children what you would have them do unto you! Our children will (eventually) treat us the way we treat them. It pays to take a deep breath and think twice, so that we will tread gently.

43. Hand Gestures Principle - Develop hand gestures which signify, “Please,” “Thank you,” “More,” “Stop,” “Be Careful,” “Use your words,” and “No.”

44. Have Fun Together Principle - Children love to know that they bring us joy and pleasure. Lighten up and have fun.

45. Help Me Out Principle - Elicit the child's support. Ask her/him to help you out.

46. Human Principle – Remember children have feelings too – just like we do. It is in everyone’s best interest to treat him or her as well or better than we treat other people for whom we are not responsible.
47. Humor Principle - Make a game out of it. Have fun. Laugh together a lot. (“How would a rabbit brush his teeth?”)
48. I Message Principle – Own your own feelings. “When you leave wet towels on the bed, the bed gets wet, and I feel angry. I would like for you to hang them on the hook behind the door.”
49. Institute Mailboxes Principle – Put mailboxes outside each child’s room, or attach one to each child’s desk. Write personal notes – suggestions, thanks, etc. and put inside the child’s mailbox. Be sure to have one on your desk or outside your room – for their messages back to you.
50. Jump Start a Belly Laugh Principle – Surprise your child by teaching him or her to jump start a belly laugh. Grab someone’s hands and jump up and down together, saying, “ho, ho” real fast, until you both are genuinely laughing. You’ll be surprised how good it feels to laugh. Your body and your brain both get a chance to “take a break,” and when you “come back” to where you were, you are both more relaxed and have better perspective.
51. Keep it Simple Principle – “Friends are not for hitting.” “Time for bed.” “Remember the rules,” “Gentle hands,” “Walking feet.” Give the child time to obey.
52. Kiss Your Brain Principle - When the child is exhibiting behavior that makes you proud, and is making great choices, be sure to praise, thank, and draw attention to his great contributions. Tell him to “kiss your brain!”
53. Let the Child Be The Teacher Principle - Let the child assume the role of teacher (or parent). Ask him to teach you a skill.
54. Logical Consequences Principle - Teach the child that behavior has consequences. If she forgets her sweater, she gets cold. If she doesn’t do her homework, she faces the teacher’s consequences. If her allowance is all gone, she doesn’t get a “Slurpee.”
55. Love Principle - When in doubt, hold the child, hug him and tell him how much you love him.
56. Make a Sacrifice Principle - Sometimes you have to forget your personal desires (talking on your cell phone, watching a movie, doing your homework) and give full attention to the child.
57. Make it Fun Principle - See if you can turn a chore into a challenge; a job into a game; a “must” into a “want to.” (“I have hidden a surprise in your room. When it is cleaned up, you will find it.”)
58. Make Up a Story Principle - Make up a story to tell the child - using another child’s name - but giving an account of an incident that occurred in which the child was at fault. Ask the child what the child in the story did that was wrong - and what he should do differently the next time.

59. Modeling Principle - Model the behavior you want. Show the child, by example, how to behave. Children are watching us – all the time – and they will grow up to be like us – whether we want them to or not.
60. Nap Principle - Take a break. A nap usually puts everything in better perspective.
61. Nip it in the Bud Principle - When you see a child doing something that is dangerous, destructive or embarrassing (to you), take immediate action. Don't let the behavior continue - hoping that it will go away. It usually gets worse, if the child knows you are watching and you are doing nothing about it. It might be that a hand signal is enough - or a "look" that means "stop." It might be that you have a code word, i.e. "red light," that always means "Stop - right now!" You might have to move toward the child, take his hand, and move him to another place in the least reinforcing way possible. Refrain from scolding, preaching, threatening, fussing - or in any other ways - letting the child have your eyeballs and your attention.
62. Other Shoe Principle – Look at the situation from the child's perspective. How would you feel if the "shoe was on the other foot?" What if the child was you and you were the child?
63. Owning the Problem Principle – Decide who owns the problem by asking yourself, "Who is it bugging?" If it is bugging you, then you own the problem and need to take responsibility for solving it – OR – you can opt to not let it bug you (and let it go), such as in sibling quibbling!
64. Partner/Co-worker Principle - Support your partner/co-worker's handling of the situation. If you disagree, move away and let him/her follow through. Leave the room, if you are having trouble not interfering. Do not negate or undermine his/her method of discipline in front of the child. If you do, the child will lose respect for both of you. Later, talk it over with your partner/co-worker and let him/her know why you do not agree with his/her way of handling the situation.
65. Pay Attention Principle - Keep your eyes and mind on what is happening. Don't wait until the child is out of control to step in.
66. Preparation Principle - Let the child know ahead of time what he can expect. (You will be able to spend "x" amount of money on shoes and may have one drink at the mall.)
67. Prompt and Praise Principle – Explain the expected behavior in a non-critical way and praise the child as soon as the behavior occurs.
68. Positive Closure Principle - At the end of the day, remind your child that she is special and loved. Help her to look for something good - about the day that is finished and the day that lies ahead.
69. Privacy Principle – NEVER embarrass a child in front of others. ALWAYS move to a private place to talk when there is a problem (especially in a restaurant, grocery store, classroom, shopping mall) Create such a place in your home. Sometimes sitting in the car to talk things over is a good idea.
70. Punt the Plan Principle - In the middle of something that is not working – move on to something else. De-stress yourself.

71. Put it in Writing Principle – If child can read, write a note to him, stating your concerns. Ask for an RSVP. Leave “I love you” notes in surprising places.
72. Read a Book (or Read the Paper) Principle - Sit down and read. Take your attention away from the child who is behaving inappropriately. Read until you have both cooled off and can deal with the situation in a productive manner.
73. Remember Who Are the Grown-ups Principle - Always remember that you are the grown-up and that you are ultimately responsible for the way things turn out. The child does not have your judgment or history of experiences and can't possibly be held responsible for the ultimate outcome.
74. Role-Playing Principle - Ask the child to exchange roles with you. Let him tell you what he would do if he were in your place. (Let him sit in your chair at the dinner table - and show you how s/he perceives you to be and to act.)
75. Satiation Principle – Allow the behavior to continue (if it is not dangerous, destructive, embarrassing, or an impediment to learning) until the child is tired of doing it.
76. Self-correction Principle – Give the child a chance to self-correct. Stop talking, preaching, lecturing, and give him space and time. Tell him you will check back with him later.
77. Shrug Principle - Learn to shrug instead of arguing. The shrug means, “I’m sorry, but that’s the way it is - end of discussion.”
78. Sing Principle –Surprise the child by singing what you want him to do. Get in the habit of making up songs (with familiar tunes, i.e. “The Farmer In the Dell,” “Jingle Bells,”) and using words to describe what you would like the children to do.
79. Staying Detached Emotionally Principle – Try to remain objective – with your eye on the goal (self-discipline) and don't let the child “hook” you emotionally – in other words, don't take his/her behavior personally.
80. Stay Healthy Principle - Remember the importance of taking good care of yourself - physically as well as emotionally. Eat well, sleep well and get plenty of exercise. You will not only be able to cope better, but you will also become a good role model for the children you love.
81. Successive Approximations Principle - Don't expect perfection. Acknowledge small steps in the right direction.
82. Switch Gears Principle - When the unexpected occurs, look for a way to make the most of the situation. For example, if you have a long wait, suggest that each of you close your eyes and listen for what you can hear, or look around and find something you have never noticed before.
83. Take a Break Principle - Tell the child to “take a break” and think about what he could do differently that would work better or be more constructive. Give him a place to go until he is ready to come back and behave more productively. (This could be a place that you have created in your home or classroom that is comfortable and quiet. A timer is sometimes helpful. The child can

determine how long he might need to reflect, refocus and calm down.) The child is in control here. He can decide when he is ready to rejoin the group or try again.

84. Take Time to Teach Principle – Often we expect children to read our minds to know how to do things they have never been taught. Although our expectations may be clear to us, our children may not have a clue.

85. Talk About Them Positively to Others Principle - Let them overhear you speaking positively about them - bragging about their good qualities and actions - to others.

86. Teach - Don't Reteach Principle - Teach your child the correct procedures and behaviors as soon as you have an opportunity. It is much harder to go back and undo a learned behavior. (A TV remote is not a toy - don't let a toddler play with it. Children need to know your expectations for entering your classroom and taking their seats - on the first day of school. Your child should not drive a car until he is legally old enough to do so. Laws are to be obeyed.)

87. Teach Your Child to Speak Up to Bullies Principle - Empower your child by role-playing and letting her/him practice speaking up (loudly, if necessary) to bullies. Bullies like cowards.

88. Thank-you Principle - Thank the child for doing the right thing - before he does it.

89. Think Of the Outcome Principle - What is your intention? What outcome are you trying to achieve? Are you trying to help the child, or live through the child? If your intention is to teach a child something he/she can later use to help him/herself, then don't let your emotions or personal agenda get in the way. For example, just because you wish you had learned to play the piano and had never had the opportunity to take lessons, don't force piano lessons on your child.

90. Third Party Principle - Tell a story about a particular situation which you are trying to resolve and elicit suggestions. For example, "There is a mom who would like her son to take out the trash. Should she (a) ask him to do it? (b) tell him to do it? (c) let him know the trash is full and needs to be taken out? (d) tell him the 'trash is calling'? (e) ask him to help her with the trash, or (f) other? What should the mom do?"

91. Thinking Principle – Take time to think about your options. Consider the outcome. Will it be positive? How do you want this to turn out?

92. Time - In Principle – Every time you are near your child, give him a loving stroke or hug. This touching can be non-verbal. Think about it. Word never quite convey the message you want to give someone. However, touching is perfect. Children are less likely to seriously misbehave when they sense a deep love and respect on the part of the one who matters to them. What you do is much more important than what you say. Have you ever noticed the way that parents kiss the heads of their babies - and the contented look on the faces of both? We need to seize every opportunity to express our love and caring in nonverbal ways as well as verbally!

93. Trust Principle - Let the child know - in many ways and often - that you trust his judgment and his ability to make good choices.

94. Turtle Time Principle - Encourage child to withdraw into his “turtle shell” to calm himself down, to think more clearly, to keep from reacting in a negative way.
95. Use Actions Instead of Words Principle - Don’t say anything. When a child says something inappropriate or hurtful, instead of responding, let the words “hang in the air.” Walk away or take his hand and move to another place. Give him a chance to “hear” what he just said. Very often, he will make an effort to “self-correct” or apologize.
96. Values are Caught and Not Taught Principle – Expose your child to role models who are passionate about their work. Take piano lessons yourself and watch your child absorb your love for music. Eat well and exercise, and watch your child imitate your example. Don’t talk about it. Do it!
97. Wait Until Later Principle – We’ll discuss this at 5:00. We both need time to cool off and think.”
98. Wants and Feelings Principle – Allow the child to want what he wants and feel what he feels. Don’t try to talk him out of or feel guilty for his wants and feelings.
99. Whisper Principle – Instead of yelling, screaming or talking in a loud voice, surprise the child by lowering your voice to a whisper. This surprise often evokes immediate attention. It also helps you to stay in control and think more clearly.
100. Who Cares Principle - Is it really that important? If not, let it go.
101. Write a Contract Principle - Sit with the child (after the emotion subsides) and together write a contract for future behavior. Be sure to let him/her have input. Then both parties sign the contract.